

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DOHA 0782

FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, QA
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS COUNTRY EVALUATION PLAN FOR QATAR

REF: STATE 147815

1. WE FIND HUMAN RIGHTS COUNTRY EVALUATION PLAN FOR QATAR CON-
VEYED IN REFTEL TO BE GENERALLY ACCURATE, COMPREHENSIVE AND

BALANCED.

2. OUR COMMENTS AS FOLLOWS:

A. WOMEN'S NON-RIGHTS MOST NEGATIVE ASPECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS
PICTURE IN QATAR. FAINT STIRRINGS OF CONSCIOUSNESS FROM WOMEN
THEMSELVES ARE STRONGLY OPPOSED BY RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY WHOSE
CLOUT ON SUBJECT REMAINS DECISIVE. POSITIVE ELEMENT IS WOMEN'S
SECTION OF QATAR UNIVERSITY, WHICH FROM ITS FOUNDATION RECOGNIZED
DESIRABILITY OF PERMITTING WOMEN ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION,
INDICATING HOPE FOR IMPROVED STATUS IN FUTURE. THERE WILL BE
MUCH PUSHING AND PULLING ON THIS ISSUE, MOSTLY UNDER THE SURFACE
OF THIS SOCIETY, FOR YEARS TO COME, PITTING WOMEN THEMSELVES
AND MORE LIBERAL MINDED OF LEADERSHIP, INCLUDING AMIR, AGAINST
RELIGIOUS FITURES. THIS IS EXTREMELY SENSITIVE AREA, AND OUTSIDE
PRODDING COULD BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE.

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B. PARTICULARLY ONEROUS PRACTICE HAS BEEN ADOPTED TO PREVENT QA-
TARIS FROM MARRYING NON-QATARIS. LATTER ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY FOREIGN
FEMALE SPOUSES WHO ARE PREVENTED FROM EVEN ENTERING COUNTRY.

C. RE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIANITY, CATHOLIC CLERICS HAVE COMMENTED
TO US THAT THEY SENSE GROWING HOSTILITY MANIFESTED IN

DIFFICULTY OF OBTAINING VISA FOR REGIONAL BISHOP AND OTHER ATMOSPHERICS. THEY ATTRIBUTE THIS TO ACCESSION TO POWER IN SAUDI ARABIA OF KING KHALID, WHOM THEY BELIEVE IS MUCH MORE INTOLERANT THAN FAISAL TOWARD NON-MUSLIMS. IN OTHER THAN RELIGIOUS AREAS, WE HAVE HEARD THAT SAUDIS MUCH MORE ACTIVE IN LEANING ON THEIR GULF BROTHERS TO STIFFEN UP MORAL TONE ALONG SAUDI LINES.

D. FOREIGN MENIAL LABORERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE FROM SOUTH ASIA, ARE THE ONLY REAL POOR IN COUNTRY. ALTHOUGH THEIR CONDITIONS OF WORK ARE REGULATED BY CONTRACT AND OTHER AGREEMENTS, GOQ IS NONE TOO ATTENTIVE TO ABUSES AND EXPLOITATION, WHICH ARE COMMON DESPITE BEST EFFORTS OF SENDING COUNTRY EMBASSIES TO PROTECT RIGHTS OF THEIR CITIZENS. ON THE PLUS SIDE, GOQ OFFERS FULL FREE HEALTH SERVICE TO THESE WORKERS AS WELL AS ALL NON-QATARIS.

3. GENERAL COMMENT: WINDS OF CHANGE ARE BLOWING IN QATAR. WITH HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS ABROAD, EXTENSIVE TRAVEL, INFLUX OF FOREIGNERS AND TACIT ENCOURAGEMENT FROM AMIR AND OTHER LIBERAL-MINDED LEADERS, GRADUAL LIBERALIZATION OF THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SCENE WITH DIRECT IMPACT ON HUMAN RIGHTS IS ONGOING. GOQ'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IS WAY AHEAD OF RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP IN THIS MOVEMENT, BUT APPROPRIATELY CAUTIOUS RE SUBSTANTIAL CLOUT RETAINED BY RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP.

4. COMMENT CONTINUED: QATARI RESPONSE TO US HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY EMPHASIS CAN BE STRONGLY POSITIVE IF IT RELATED TO HUMANE ASPECTS OF CONFIDENTIAL

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ISLAM, WHICH IS STRONGEST SINGLE ELEMENT OF COHESIVENESS IN QATARI SOCIETY. THE PRESIDENT'S STRONG MORAL POSTURE AND IMAGE IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND OTHER FIELDS HAVE STRUCK A RESPONSIVE CORD HERE AND CAN SERVE AS AN EXCELLENT BASIS FOR CONSTRUCTIVE EXCHANGES ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES
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